

# THE MODEL CHILD

Drawings by Nell I. Batt

By RICHARD DEHAN



Miss Cooter was formally invested with Harold.

**H**E arrived late, long after the ship of his father's fortune had been safely tugged into dock, announcing his entrance upon this terrestrial stage at a moment when people had ceased to expect him. I may say that Tom and Leila, having spent twelve years of married life in the propagation of theories alone, had the most definite notions upon the subject of infant rearing, training, culture, and so forth. Leila intended, she informed me in confidence, to be "an advanced mother," and Tom, as father to the child of an advanced mother, could hardly help turning out an advanced father, even had he not cherished ambitions in that line.

The boy—for, as Tom reassured all sympathetic callers during the high-pressure first week of its existence, it undoubtedly was a boy—seemed on first sight rather smaller and spottier than the child of so many brilliant prospects had any right to be. They gave him the name of Harold, a clanking procession of other names coupled to it, ending in Alexander Eric. And they engaged a professional child culturist, Miss Sallie Cooter, certified teacher, trained nurse, member of the Ethno-physiological Society of America and one doesn't know how many others, to rear Harold on the very latest scientific plan.

Miss Cooter, as the intimate friend and chosen disciple of the inventress of the system at which Tom and Leila had taken fire (a lady of literary talents and original views, who had brought up on purely hygienic principles a family of one, and expanded it into a multiplicity of chapters)—Miss Cooter might be trusted to achieve the desired result, and turn out Harold, physically and mentally, a prodigy of infantile perfection. Her work was purely philanthropic, and if she consented to accept the inadequate salary of a thousand dollars a year in return for her services, Leila and Tom explained, she must in no sense be treated as a hiredling.

The united efforts of the family automobile and local expressman fetched Miss Cooter and a mountain of satgas from the station one spring day, and she came down to afternoon tea in the very newest of Parisian tea gowns—which, properly speaking, is not a tea gown at all. She was decidedly pretty, being dark, slim, bright-eyed, keen-faced, and almost painfully intelligent-looking, even without her gold-framed pince-nez. We dozed the evening to sociability, as Harold's regimen of mental and physical culture was to begin the following day.

"But you shall have a little peep at Baby," Leila said, "when we go up to dress for dinner."

Miss Cooter agreed. "But I guess I've got to ask you, since the boy's name is Harold, to call him by it, and no other," she said. "Our society is dead against abbreviations and pet names. We hold that they act

as a clog upon the expanding faculties of the child, and arrest mental progress. Besides, when maturity is reached, how absurd to hear middle-aged men and women addressed as Toto and Tiny!"

Tom, who has a way of calling Leila Mouse when in good humor, turned rich imperial purple at this home thrust, and Leila, whose pet name for Tom is Tumps, called attention to the green fly on the pot roses, both silently registering a vow never again, save when alone, to use the offending appellations.

**M**ISS COOTER was formally invested with Harold on the following morning. His ex-nurse, a plump, rosy-cheeked countrywoman, painfully devoid of culture, and absolutely unskilled in the repression of emotion, was relegated, in floods of tears, to command of the laundry. Leila, compassionating the grief of the exile, would have pleaded for Mary's reduction to the post of undernurse; but Miss Cooter pronounced that Mary was an obstacle in the way of Progress, and an enemy to Culture, and must go.

Mary went, and Harold, at first too stunned by her desertion to yield to sorrow, presently proclaimed his bereavement in a succession of ear-piercing shrieks.

"What is to be done?" queried Leila, by signs. Applying both hands to his mouth after the fashion of a speaking trumpet, Tom vocalized the suggestion, "Send—*for* Mary—back!"

But Miss Cooter sternly shook her head, and, bending over the cradle that contained Harold, looked sternly in his flushed and disfigured countenance. He immediately held his breath, growing from crimson to purple and from purple to black as she delivered her inaugural address.

"My dear Har'd," said she with crisp distinctness, "you are a verry little boy—"

"Hear, hear!" I interpolated, and got a frown from Leila.

"And at three months old your reasoning faculties are not developed enough for you to comprehend that what you don't like may be the best thing for you. Mary has gone, and Mary will not come back. Henceforth you are in my cayah, and you will find me firm, but gentle. However badly you may act, I shall not punish you."

Harold hiccuped and stared up at the bright, intellectual face above him with round, astonished eyes and open, dribbling mouth.

"Your own sense of what is right and what is wrong, dormant though it be at this verry moment, I intend to awaken and—"

Harold, never before in his brief life harangued after this fashion, appeared already to grasp the idea that something was wrong. The expression of astonishment faded, his down-drooped mouth assumed the bell or trumpet shape, and, rapidly doubling and undoubling himself with mechanical regularity, he emitted the most astonishing series of sounds we had yet heard from him. No cresses were administered for the management of his nose, nor broken English babbled in his infant ears. The rules of the System of Child Culture absolutely prohibited petting, and baby language was denounced by Miss Cooter as "pernicious." As she proscribed, Harold left off howling after a certain interval,

"Now I guess you have learned one lesson already," said Miss Cooter. "When you are older, Har'd, you will comprehend that the truest kindness on your parents' part prompted the separation that has given you pain. You will have your bottle now. You will say 'Thank you' for it, and after consuming the contents you will go quietly to sleep."

**B**UT it took a long time to convince the dubious Harold that the trumpet-shaped, nickel-silver-stoppered vessel tendered by his new guardian was the equivalent of his beloved and familiar Maw. When finally convinced, he grabbed it without the slightest attempt at saying "Thank you," and, with the gloomiest scowl that I have ever beheld upon a countenance of such pulpy immaturity, applied himself to deglutition.

Miss Cooter shook her head discouragingly. "This child has a strawngly developed animal nature," pronounced she; "a throwback to the primeval savage, I should opine."

"Delightful! Do buy him a little stone ax and a baby bearskin, Leila," I pleaded. "Think what light he will throw upon the Tertiary Period—if Miss Cooter happens to be right!"

But Miss Cooter shook her head. "He must be environed by softening and civilizing influences," said she, "from this verry moment. Vegetarian diet is what I should strawngly recommend." Her eye doubtfully questioned the rapidly sinking level of the sterilized milk in Harold's glass trumpet.

"There is such a thing as a cow tree, isn't there?" said Leila anxiously. "Perhaps we might acclimatize one in the tropical house."

"But while the cow tree is being acclimatized," I asked disturbingly, "upon what is Harold to live?"

"Kindly take this," said Miss Cooter. "May I trouble you? Please!" she repeated sternly.

But Harold only screwed up his eyes and dug his pinky fists into them as his matroness took the empty trumpet away, telling us stories of an atypical and highly cultured boy baby of her acquaintance who not only exhibited Chesterfieldian politeness at four months of age, saying "Please" and "Thank you," and "Kindly pass the salt," but regularly performed its own ablutions, went through breathing exercises and simple gymnastics, was familiar with the use of the abacus, and could work out sums in simple addition upon a patent hygienic slate.

All these facts Miss Cooter put before us with convincing eloquence. Her language was well chosen, her scientific knowledge and technical skill quite appalling. There was nothing about a baby that she did not understand, except perhaps—the baby.

**F**ROM that day Harold lived under the microscope. Charts of his temper, as of his temperature, were regularly kept up to date; and his progress, physical and psychological, was recorded by Miss Cooter in a kind of logbook, in which data of meteorological disturbances appeared with distressing frequency. He was not precocious enough to be classified as abnormal, or sufficiently original to come under the heading "Atypical," or old enough to tell lies and so be dubbed imaginative. But that tertiary ancestor from whom, according to Miss Cooter, he derived his temperament, must have possessed some strength of character; for from the beginning to the end Harold's strongest prejudice was manifested toward Miss Cooter, his most violent attachment in the direction of the banished Mary, for whom he howled at regular intervals until he forgot her, when he became reserved, distrustful, and apathetic.

His intellectual qualities were not of the kind that responded to scientific foreing. He never learned that an orange was a sphere, or a rusk an irregular cube. The India rubber letters and object blocks possessed for him no meaning; the colored balls of the abacus awakened in him only a tepid interest. He was in texture flabby, and habitually wore an expression of languid indifference; insensitised to utter boredom when Miss Cooter was delivering one of her oral lectures.

Despite his sanitary sur-



Lying on the cotton lap of his recovered Mary.